

DATeline #59 CALIFORNIA  
EDWIN GORDON

FEBRUARY 11, 1976

THE RISE OF CONSUMER COOPERATIVES  
(VOICED PIECE IN TAPE LIBRARY)

ANNCR: AND NOW THE VOICE OF AMERICA PRESENTS DATeline. . .  
ANOTHER IN THE SERIES OF PROGRAMS ABOUT PEOPLE,  
PLACES AND EVENTS IN THE UNITED STATES. TODAY,  
FROM VOA CORRESPONDENT EDWIN GORDON IN CALIFORNIA,  
A REPORT ON HOW MORE AND MORE AMERICANS ARE  
BANDING TOGETHER TO GET BETTER VALUES FROM THEIR  
PURCHASING DOLLARS AND SHARE IN THE PROFITS OF THE  
STORES THEY BUY FROM.

VOICE: THE SHOPPING CENTER IN THE SAN FRANCISCO BAY AREA  
IS LARGE. IN ADDITION TO THE GROCERY SUPERMARKET,  
THERE'S A PHARMACY, A "WILDERNESS" SHOP FOR CAMPING  
SUPPLIES, A HARDWARE AND VARIETY STORE, A GARDEN  
SHOP, A GASOLINE STATION, AN AUTOMOBILE REPAIR  
WORKSHOP. AND EVEN A RE-CYCLING CENTER WHERE OLD  
NEWSPAPERS, ALUMINUM CANS, AND BOTTLES CAN BE  
DROPPED OFF TO BE CONVERTED INTO SOMETHING USEFUL  
AGAIN. IT'S ONE OF THIRTEEN OUTLETS OPERATED BY  
THE CONSUMERS COOPERATIVE OF BERKELEY, WHICH HAS A  
MEMBERSHIP OF EIGHTY-TWO THOUSAND FAMILIES -- DOUBLE  
THAT OF TEN YEARS AGO -- AND DID SIXTY-NINE MILLION  
DOLLARS WORTH OF BUSINESS LAST YEAR. IT'S THE  
LARGEST CONSUMERS' COOPERATIVE IN THE NATION.

VOICE:  
(CONT'D)

YOU DON'T HAVE TO BE A MEMBER TO SHOP AT A CO-OP STORE. BUT IF YOU ARE A MEMBER, YOU CAN GET REFUNDS AT THE END OF THE YEAR BASED ON THE AMOUNT OF PURCHASES YOU'VE MADE, AND IF YOU OWN MORE THAN FIFTY DOLLARS WORTH OF SHARES IN THE CO-OP, YOU CAN GET DIVIDENDS. THAT'S HOW THE PROFITS ARE DISTRIBUTED.

IN ONE STORE, TWENTY-SIX YEAR OLD DOMINIC BARILE, CARRYING AN INFANT AS HE SHOPPED, SAID HE BELIEVES "IN THE WHOLE IDEA OF PEOPLE INVESTING IN IT AND HAVING A VOTE."

ANOTHER SHOPPER, AN ELDERLY WOMAN, SAID SHE LIKES THE BARGAINS AT THE CO-OP. A YOUNG HUSBAND AND WIFE SAID THEY JOINED BECAUSE OF OTHER SERVICES OFFERED BY THE BERKELEY ORGANIZATION -- REDUCED RATES ON CHARTER VACATION FLIGHTS, A CREDIT UNION, A HEALTH INSURANCE PLAN, LOW-COST LEGAL AID.

BUT WHAT THE CO-OPS MAINLY DEAL IN IS FOOD. THEY FEEL THAT THEY CAN KEEP PRICES DOWN BY DOING BUSINESS DIRECTLY WITH THE FARMERS, CUTTING OUT THE MIDDLE-MAN DISTRIBUTOR AND MERCHANDISER WHO ARE BLAMED BY MANY FOR INFLATION IN THE SUPERMARKETS. THE IDEA IS GROWING. RIGHT NOW THERE ARE TWO HUNDRED FIFTY CONSUMER COOPERATIVES IN THE UNITED STATES WITH A

VOICE:  
(CONT'D)

MEMBERSHIP OF ABOUT SIX THOUSAND. THE SECOND LARGEST COOPERATIVE IS IN GREENBELT, MARYLAND WHICH SELLS GROCERIES AND DANISH MODERN FURNITURE AND ALSO OPERATES GAS STATIONS. THE THIRD LARGEST COOPERATIVE OPERATES FROM NEW YORK CITY.

THE FIRST COOPERATIVE IN THIS COUNTRY WAS FOR FARMERS ORGANIZED IN 1857 AS A MUTUAL FIRE INSURANCE COMPANY. AT THE TURN OF THE CENTURY THE NUMBER BEGAN TO INCREASE GREATLY AND TODAY THEY PRODUCE AND DISTRIBUTE FARM PRODUCE AND BUY SUPPLIES SUCH AS SEED IMPLEMENTS AND FERTILIZER.

SOME ARE HUGE, SUCH AS THE ASSOCIATED MILK PRODUCERS OF SAN ANTONIO, TEXAS, WHICH HAS MORE THAN THIRTY-THREE THOUSAND MEMBERS AND YEARLY SALES APPROACHING ONE THOUSAND FIVE HUNDRED MILLION DOLLARS.

THE CONSUMER CO-OPERATIVES -- THE RETAIL STORES FOR THE GENERAL PUBLIC -- BEGAN TO FLOURISH IN THE 1930S. THE BERKELEY CO-OP IS THE OUTGROWTH OF TWO ORGANIZATIONS THAT WERE STARTED IN 1937 AND THEN MERGED.

THE MEMBERS OF THE BERKELEY CO-OP ARE NOT AVERSE TO ENGAGING IN SOCIAL ISSUES. THEY'VE SUPPORTED THE FARM WORKERS IN BOYCOTTS OF NON-UNION LETTUCE AND WINE, AND HAVE WITHDRAWN FROM THEIR SHELVES AEROSOL CANS THAT COULD POLLUTE THE ENVIRONMENT WITH FLUOROCARBONS. THERE'S CONTROVERSY AMONG THE MEMBERS, OF COURSE, ABOUT THIS. SOME FEEL IT IS THE DUTY OF A PEOPLE'S COOPERATIVE TO GET INTO SUCH ISSUES SUCH

VOICE:  
(CONT'D)

AS THE QUESTION OF NUCLEAR POWER PLANTS. OTHERS FEEL THAT THE CO-OP SHOULD LIMIT ITSELF TO PROPOSING BETTER FOOD PRODUCTION CONTROLS TO BENEFIT THE CONSUMER, OR TO GIVING THE SHOPPER MARKETING ADVICE EITHER POSITIVE OR NEGATIVE. IN THE BERKELEY CO-OP STORES YOU CAN SEE SIGNS READING: "LIVER IS GOOD, BUT TOO MUCH IS NOT." OR "DIET MARGARINES ARE FIFTY PERCENT WATER." TO PREVENT TOOTH DECAY, THE BERKELEY CO-OP STORES ARE DE-EMPHASIZING THE SALE OF CANDIES. AND EACH BERKELEY CO-OP HAS A SUGGESTION BOX. THE STORE MANAGERS GET UP TO FIFTY SUGGESTIONS A WEEK FROM MEMBERS WHO MIGHT PROPOSE CERTAIN FOODS BE STOCKED, OR THAT OTHERS BE TAKEN OFF THE SHELVES. EACH SUGGESTION GETS A REPLY THAT IS POSTED ON A STORE BULLETIN BOARD. THE MEMBERS ARE POSSESSIVE ABOUT THEIR COOPERATIVE. WHEN ONE SHOPPER WAS ASKED WHY SHE DROPPED A NOTE IN THE SUGGESTION BOX, SHE REPLIED: "WHY SHOULDN'T I? IT'S MY STORE. I AM -- WE ARE -- THE BOSS."

ANNCR: A REPORT ON CONSUMER COOPERATIVES, A GROWING MOVEMENT IN THE UNITED STATES. JOIN US AGAIN FOR ANOTHER DATELINE REPORT NEXT ----- (AT THIS TIME). THIS IS -----.

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WJL/CAK